TL 1709

Parliamentarians for East Timor
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Memorandum to Lord Avebury on PET and moves to create another PET

1. Discussions took place in Portugal in April to set up an international organisation of parliamentarians. Two people are involved, a Portuguese MEP, Rui Amaral, and Professor Antonio Barbedo Magalhaes of Oporto University. Mr Amaral has experience with an international parliamentary group working on the Middle East; Professor Magalhaes is best known for the annual seminars on East Timor he has held under the auspices of Oporto University since the mid 1980s.

2. The idea has been taken to the highest level in Portugal and has found some support at the Foreign Ministry and in the National Assembly; President Mario Soares was insistent however that before any steps were taken, the initiative should be discussed with Luisa Teotonio Pereira of the Portuguese solidarity organisation, CDPM. It was only when Luisa became involved that the question of an already-existing organisation, PET, was raised.

The proposal was raised also at this year's meeting of East Timor solidarity groups in Amsterdam in February by Professor Magalhaes. All groups present expressed the view that a new organisation was not necessary as one already exists.

3. The idea is that the new organisation would follow the convening of an international conference of parliamentarians. This revives an idea that was current in the late 1980s but which came to nothing as the Portuguese government was concentrating all efforts on the (aborted) MPs visit to East Timor.

4. The following points need to be explained as the possible background to this initiative:

a. There is resentment among Portuguese MPs that PET was founded in Lisbon, during a visit there of three MPs, but Portuguese MPs were not drawn into the initiative. This probably explains the coolness of response in Lisbon to any initiatives taken by PET up to now, excepting their eagerness to take part in the PET mission to meet the UN Secretary-General.

b. There have been very few initiatives over the years by Portuguese MPs with regard to East Timor. (The same cannot be said for Portuguese MEPs of all parties who have pursued the issue doggedly at the European Parliament.) This is primarily

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because all initiatives on East Timor in Portugal are the prerogative of the government, leaving little if anything for the National Assembly to do. This was highlighted during the preparations for the (aborted) MPs visit to East Timor during which MPs played a very passive role and most of the time, hardly knew what was happening. The government party in any case holds the strings in Parliament, leaving little room for initiative by members of the Special Parliamentary Commission on East Timor. The situation is quite different in Brussels, where pro-East Timor MEPs tend to look to their Portuguese colleagues for initiatives on East Timor.

c. It would appear that Rui Amaral is himself largely unaware of the existence of PET and may have responded to the idea of having an organisation without realising this would clash with an existing organisation. The same cannot be said of Professor Magalhaes who seems intent on bringing this new organisation into being to supersede or replace PET.

5. We should for a moment reflect on our achievements so far and the present position of PET.

a. It already has 250 signed-up members from eleven countries, including a large contingent of MEPs. There have been occasional important initiatives from London, first and foremost the mission that visited Peres de Cuellar in 1990.

b. Two occasional PET Bulletins have been produced by Carmel.

c. In several countries, notably Canada, the UK and Sweden, local PET members have taken their own initiatives - tabling questions, initiating debates, making statements, writing to the UN or, as in London, holding a hearing on the Santa Cruz massacre.

d. It is clear that the health and vitality of the local PET groups depend very much on having committed MPs, well supported by a local solidarity group giving regular input on what issues need to be taken up.

e. PET has no formal status and has no articles of association. International initiatives have depended entirely on Lord Avebury and Carmel taking action. Without a formal organisational structure, there have hardly ever been any consultations about the nature of work being undertaken, apart from the consultations that took place over the mission to New York. It also lacks a financial base. The only contributions have come from a donation to finance the production of the Santa Cruz hearings report and one from the Japanese MPs group which was large enough to keep the organisation in stamp money, paying for faxes, printing costs, etc up to the present day.

f. With Carmel as secretary, using TAPOL office facilities, PET has frequently had to take second place in her own priorities.

She has been overwhelmed by her TAPOL work, especially since Santa Cruz, meaning that far too little has been done to build the organisation's membership, re-new lists of members after national elections, take well-planned international initiatives, produce a regular publication, and so on.

g. Hence, while not disregarding the initiatives already taken internationally from London, PET has survived and in some places thrived, thanks largely to the initiatives of members in several countries.

The way forward

6. It is clearly not viable for another PET to be created, which would only lead to confusion. Careful consideration should be given to improving and regularising the international activities of PET, which could be assisted by having someone else take over the position of secretary.

7. It would be very unwise, if this is the intention of the initiators, for a new PET to be based in Lisbon. This would turn the organisation into what people would regard as being an extension of the Portuguese government. Nor have Portuguese MPs shown themselves to be keen initiators of the East Timor issue.

8. There is an urgent need for you to have a meeting with Rui Amaral*) to discuss the way forward. It is proposed that Mr Amaral should be invited to London to consider the future of international parliamentary work. There is no suggestion that the invitation should include paying his ticket; he could come while in Brussels, presumably out of his MEP budget.

The suggested agenda for the meeting is as follows:

a. Review of PET and the need for improvements incorporating Mr Amaral's ideas, for the future;

b. Proposal to send a mission to Boutros-Ghali;

c. Proposal to convene a working meeting of a small number of parliamentarians from the countries where most activities have taken place, a much less ambitious project than the international conference being proposed but probably more workable and effective.

Carmel Budiardjo,
Secretary of PET
16 May 1993

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Copy to Luisa Teotonio Pereira, CDPM